

An Analysis Of ESL Students' Multimedia Project Work: A Case Of Language Transfer

Wan Fara Adlina Wan Mansor & Noraisah Muhari
Faculty Of Education
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Abstract: This study seeks to investigate the case of language transfer by using an analysis of errors adopted from Elliott (1983) towards ESL students' Multimedia Project Work saved in CDs. The data for the study were obtained from six sets of CDs produced by the group of previous ESL students from Faculty of Computer Science, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Skudai for their English for Academic Communication course (UHB 1412). The CDs were analyzed via checklist in order to identify the types of errors and patterns of the errors made. The analysis of the students' Project Work has shown that there are twelve types of errors that are closely related to the case of language transfer. Verbs contributed the highest percentage of errors in this study while the infinitive-to is the lowest. Errors are unavoidable in learning a second language. Subjects tend to make errors in this area as indication of their confusion of both languages. Therefore, they tend to use their knowledge of first language to cope with the insufficient knowledge of a second language. Moreover, the analysis also indicates that the subjects faced two categories of errors that are known as Intra-lingual errors and Inter-lingual errors due to conscious and subconscious transfer. Analyzing these errors would give insights into the reasons for the language transfer or interference underlying the occurrence of these errors as pedagogical implication that could help students to improve their knowledge on both Languages (L1 and L2).

Abstrak: Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidik kes perpindahan bahasa dengan menggunakan analisis kesalahan oleh Elliott (1983) terhadap Projek Multimedia pelajar (Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua) yang disimpan dalam CD. Data-data bagi kajian ini diperolehi daripada enam set CD yang dihasilkan oleh sekumpulan pelajar (Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua iaitu ESL) dari Fakulti Sains Komputer UTM Skudai bagi mata pelajaran English for Academic Communication (UHB 1412). Penganalisan terhadap Projek Multimedia pelajar ESL ini telah dilakukan dengan menggunakan senarai semak bagi mengenalpasti jenis-jenis kesalahan dan corak di mana ianya dilakukan. Penganalisan terhadap Projek Multimedia pelajar ESL ini telah menunjukkan bahawa terdapat dua belas jenis kesalahan yang mempunyai hubungkait yang rapat dengan perpindahan bahasa di dalam Kerja Projek Multimedia pelajar. Kata kerja merupakan penyumbang peratusan kesalahan tertinggi dalam kajian kes ini manakala kata penghubung 'to' adalah yang terendah. Kesalahan tidak dapat dielakkan dalam mempelajari bahasa kedua. Subjek-subjek melakukan kesalahan ini disebabkan oleh kekeliruan dalam kedua-dua bahasa. Oleh itu, mereka akan menggunakan pengetahuan bahasa pertama bagi mengatasi kepincangan dalam bahasa kedua. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan, subjek-subjek mengalami dua kategori kesalahan yang dikenali sebagai kesalahan Intra lingua dan kesalahan Inter lingua disebabkan oleh perpindahan secara sedar atau separa sedar. Penganalisan terhadap kesalahan-kesalahan ini diharap dapat memberikan gambaran tentang perpindahan bahasa atau gangguan ini berlaku serta dapat memberikan implikasi pedagogi yang boleh membantu pelajar bagi memperbaiki pengetahuan mereka dalam kedua-dua bahasa ini (Bahasa pertama dan bahasa kedua).

Keywords: language transfer

Introduction

Statement of Problem

The influence of first language in the acquisition of a second language in terms of negative transfer will give problems to ESL learners especially in their essay writings. According to Rod Ellis (1985:23), 'Behaviorist learning theory predicts that 'transfer' will take place from first language to the second language. Transfer will be 'negative' when there is proactive inhibition. In this case, errors will result.' Furthermore, based on the statement made by Bright and McGregor (1970:236) (cited in Rod Ellis 1985:22), Behaviorist believes that 'old habits get in the way of learning new habit'. This is the situation where the knowledge of first language will influence the acquisition of the second language and known as language interference or language transfer.

For years, acquiring English as a Second Language or as the target language itself has been a problem for many of ESL learners. It is probably because of the lack of exposure and opportunity to practice as environments discourage learning in English. Communication and interaction mainly facilitated the use of first language or mother tongue. As in Malaysian context, people of different races interact in Malay language rather than use English as a medium of interaction. This applies to the learning environment in school as well as in higher institutions.

The situation concerning language becomes harder with the development of multimedia and technology in education as English does play an important role in this field. This would require emphasis in English as well as investigation into learners' performance in English language to determine area of difficulties or problems of negative transfer faced by these learners if there are any.

Researchers can begin looking at the errors that exist in the students' Multimedia Project Work CDs, in terms of its language structures, the words used, spelling and more. Error analysis is needed to analyze the data gathered from the Project Work. Therefore, by detecting and analyzing learners' errors would give information about the difficulties faced by these students as well as reveal the underlying reasons that give rise to these errors. Thus, this would be beneficial for the teachers and students in terms of helpful and meaningful feedback. Therefore, they can be taken as tools to help students overcome their problems. This would therefore ensure production of accurate language in their writing and better performance in English as a whole.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. to identify types of error(s) made by ESL learners in their Multimedia Project Work.
2. to provide any particular patterns in which errors appear in ESL Learners' Multimedia Project Work.
3. to examine the reasons underlying the occurrence of error(s) based on interference (or language transfer).
4. to suggest pedagogical implications in view of SLA feedback obtained from the analysis of error(s) in ESL Learners' Multimedia Project Work.

Significance of the Study

The analysis of errors in the students' multimedia project work would therefore provide insights into helping ESL students to overcome their language difficulties and therefore enable them to produce accurate and fluent language. Moreover, with the information obtained from the analysis of learners' errors in their Multimedia Project Work will help teachers identify the problematic areas that hinder the production of accurate language. Teachers also can gain benefits in designing or planning strategies and measure in a way to help the students to overcome their problems and improve the language performance. Indirectly, these will be able to inculcate awareness among the learners of the common types of errors and avoid repeating it. Knowledge of errors that occur such as interference and language transfer would be able to help them improve their language accuracy and competence in English. As for the examination purposes, the ability to write accurately with minimum errors would be an advantage in terms of marks to be scored by the students. Therefore, the ability to write accurately is considered important.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study was focused on the Multimedia Project Work gathered from a group of Computer Science students of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) last semester. Multimedia Project Work is defined as materials that the researcher need to look thoroughly as a case study regardless of its definitions in common. Therefore Multimedia Project Work acts as the thing to be measure and analysis in this study. This Project Work was part of an assignment for English for Academic Communication course (UHB1412). Even though, the original assignment just asked for paper based Project Work, this Multimedia Project work was used to enhance the Computer Science students' skills in computer, Internet as well as knowledge of English.

The analysis was done on the CDs where Multimedia Project Work were recorded. The project work contained the introductions on the project work, pictures of the members of the group, essay writings, and note-making, which formed part of the UHB 1412 requirements. The researcher looked at the Multimedia Project Work as a whole regardless of its length. The researcher then analyzed the errors made by the students in the Multimedia Project Work. The analysis of errors was done on the whole project work done by the students to determine the type of errors made by the students in terms of linguistic or grammatical classification, the frequency of occurrence and the patterns of errors (if any). Consequently, the researcher tried to infer the reasons for the occurrence in terms of interference and language transfer and perhaps come up with the pedagogical implications for it. The samples consisted of six CDs from six groups of Computer Science students that contain the Multimedia Project Work.

Methodology

Elliott's Checklist (1983)

The adaptation of the Elliott's checklist (1983) in this case study is suitable to identify types of errors made by the students and to provide any particular patterns in which errors appear in their Multimedia Project Work. In addition, it was also used to identify the reasons underlying the occurrence of errors in the learners' Project Work. Hence, the researcher hopes to suggest pedagogical implications in view of SLA feedback obtained from the analysis of errors.

Multimedia Project Work

The data for the study were obtained from the CDs produced by the group of previous ESL students from Faculty of Computer Science, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Skudai for their English for Academic Communication (UHB 1412). Multimedia Project Work therefore acts a medium where the data of the

study were obtained. Six sets of compact discs (CD) have been provided by one of the lecturers teaching the course.

There are several parts in the CDs, which include Introduction, Articles, Articles Review or Essay Writings, Note Making and more. There are six topics in total provided by six groups of students for the Multimedia Project Work. The topics were: The Islands, Smoking, Stress, Mangroves, Pollution and Computer Crimes. All the ESL learners are almost of the same level of achievement or performance in English. Therefore this indicates the homogeneity of the learners' performance and achievement in the field of English language. Majority of the ESL learners are at the average level in terms of their performance in English. It is hypothesized that the ESL learners have the high tendency to use their structures of first language towards their target language especially in their writings.

Result

The study reveals that the subjects in this research had experienced problems in their second language due to the case of language transfer. This is due to the different types of errors occur because of the factors related to the language transfer such as the absentee of certain rules in L1 when learning L2, instability of learners' linguistic knowledge and uncertainty and inconsistency in handling a linguistic system. An analysis of errors has been done as a way to investigate the case of language transfer among ESL students.

There are twelve types of errors which include verbs, conjunctions/ connectors, Tenses, Pronouns, Prepositions, Subject Verb Agreement (SVA), Articles, Possessive, Spelling, Words choice, singular/ plural and Infinitive –To. There is no consistency of the total number of errors made by the subjects. It is tend to be different from one subject to the other. The most seven language areas that created problem to majority of the subjects are Verbs, Tense, pronouns, Preposition, Article, Words Choice and Singular/Plural. There are two categories of errors which is Inter-lingual Errors and Intra-lingual Errors.

There are particular patterns that could be observed in the types and number of errors made by the subjects. Language transfer or interference occurred at the grammatical level or so called syntactical aspect. It can be seen from the types of errors made especially the most errors made which are verbs, conjunctions/connectors and tenses as well. In this study, most of the errors occurs such as Verbs, Tenses, Word Choice, Subject Verb Agreement (SVA), Singular/Plural, Article, Conjunction / connectors and Pronoun are the consequences of the Inter-lingual Errors. Thus, leads to Intra-lingual Errors such as Preposition, infinitive-to, and possessive. Both of the categories of errors contribute to the case of language transfer of interference. Moreover, the researcher found that language transfer among the subjects may be due to conscious or subconscious transfer.

Discussion

The researcher found that language transfer among the subjects may be due to conscious or subconscious transfer. They consciously practice transfer by guessing when producing the sentences, words or structures in a second language because they have insufficient knowledge. This can be seen from the errors made such as Singular/Plural, Articles, Verbs, Preposition, infinitive-to. Meanwhile, subconscious transfer took place when they do not realize that the structures and usage of the areas are different in both languages. Therefore, they tend to use their knowledge of first language to cope with this problem. This can be seen clearly from the errors made in Word Choice, Subject Verb Agreement (SVA), Tenses, and Conjunction.

Most errors made are the evidence of learning process. When learners make mistakes, their errors are very important parts of the learning process as errors are inevitable especially in learning a second language.

Therefore the problem of language transfer or so-called interference arises. The researcher believes that if the subjects just worked harder, their English language proficiency could be improved drastically and quickly. Avoiding errors depend on the student's stage of language acquisition, motivation, environment and readiness.

Conclusion

This study has shown that there are twelve types of errors which include verbs, conjunctions/ connectors, Tenses, Pronouns, Prepositions, Subject Verb Agreement (SVA), Articles, Possessive, Spelling, Words choice, singular/ plural and Infinitive –To. The three errors mostly made by the subjects were verbs, Prepositions and Word Choice. There exists a particular pattern in which the errors occurred that can be seen in the types and number of errors made by the subjects. However the patterns are different due to the nature of knowledge. Learners and teachers can gain insights from the underlying reasons of interference that cause the errors. Therefore, it is proven, as there exist a case of language transfer in the students' Multimedia Project Work and Language Transfer was found to be the main reason for the interference. Based on the analysis of the errors made, the researcher concludes that the errors occurred in students' Multimedia Project Work is a consequence of the case of language transfer they are experiencing.

References

- Allen, H.B. & Russel N.B. (1965). Teaching English as a Second Language. USA: Mc Graw Hill.
- Baharuddin Abu Kassim (1970). An Analysis of Students' Syntactical Errors, Based on A Contrastive Analysis of English and Malay Sentence Patterns. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional English Language Centre.
- Brown, H.D. (1987). Principle of Language Learning and Teaching. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc.
- Butler-Pascoe, M.E & Wilburg, K.M. (2003). Technology and Teaching English Language Learners. United States of America: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Corder, S.P. (1974). The Significance of Learners Error in Richards, J.C. (ed). (1984) Error Analysis, Perspective on Second Language Acquisition. London: Longman.
- Cross, D. (1991). A Practical Handbook of Language Teaching. Hertford Shine Ltd. Prentice Hall Int.
- Dubin, F. & Olshtain, E. (1977). Facilitating Language Learning. A Guidebook for ESL/EFL Teacher. United Stated of America: Mc Graw Hill.
- Dulay, H., Burt, M. & Krashen (1982). Language Two. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Elliott, A.B. (1983). Errors in English. Singapore: Singapore University Press
- Ellis, R. (1985). Understanding Second Language Acquisition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Flynn, S.and Martohardjono, G. (1995). Toward Theory-Driven Language Pedagogy, In Eckman, F.R et. al. (Eds.), Second Language Acquisition theory and Pedagogy.(pp. 45-59). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Gass, S. & Selinker, L.(1983) Language Transfer : A Conference Report in SEAMEO Regional Language Centre (ed.) 1983, Transfer and Translation in Language Learning and Teaching. Singapore: Singapore University Press.

Hoffman, C. (1991). An Introduction to Bilingualism. New York: Longman

Jain, M.P. (1974). Error Analysis: Source, Cause and Significance in Richards, J.C (ed). 1974, Error Analysis, Perception on Second Language Acquisition. London: Longman.

Jarvis, S. (2000). Methodological Rigor in the Study of Transfer: Identifying L1 Influence in the Interlanguage Lexicon. *Language Learning*. 50(2), 245-309.

Klein, W. (1986). Second Language Acquisition. Cambridge, London: Cambridge University Press.

Krashen, S.D. (1987). Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition. Great Britain: Prentice Hall, Inc.